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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence and from other agencies within the Intelligence Community. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Argentina: Troubles in the Junta

President Videla, who has proceeded with great caution for more than a year to consolidate his political position, is coming under increased pressure from his junta partner, navy chief Admiral Massera. The opportunistic admiral is generally identified with the hard-line current of opinion that espouses authoritarian measures in national security and civilian politics. Massera has long disapproved of the army's predominance in the junta and throughout the government. He has tried in the past to unsettle Videla, whom he views as indecisive, ineffective, and too willing to compromise. The President continues to have substantial support both within and outside the military.

In recent months, Massera has been openly critical of the administration's economic policies and recent statements by Videla alluding to the preeminence of the army. Interservice rivalry is characteristic of the Argentine armed forces, particularly between the army and navy, and personal ambitions often supersede ideological or policy differences. Nevertheless, it is increasingly difficult to conceal friction, and the increased media coverage of the latest flareup within the junta may portend an escalation of the conflict. Massera's divisiveness may make it more difficult for the junta to agree on and implement national policy.

The navy in recent days has assumed a high profile as a defender of Argentine sovereignty, and Massera no doubt will exploit this position in his differences with Videla and in his personal quest for added prestige.

The Foreign Ministry--controlled by the navy--delivered a stiff protest to Chile last week over alleged violations of territorial waters and unauthorized overflights in southern Argentina, where there are boundary problems with Santiago. Massera's recent declaration that the navy "is prepared to prevent any geographical mutilation of the nation within its area of responsibility"

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clearly was designed for internal political consumption. Rising tensions with Chile evidently are confined primarily to the navy. High-level officers in the army and air force participated in the Chilean independence celebration in Santiago at the same time the Foreign Ministry was making its protests.

The somber warnings to Chile and the highly publicized seizure last week by Argentine destroyers of several Soviet fishing trawlers operating within the 200-mile territorial limit create a hard act for the army to follow.

In addition to its image-building exercises, the navy is rumored to have engineered a number of recent incidents designed to discredit Videla. The small magazine *Conviccion*, which many believe is linked to the navy, recently attacked Videla's trip to Washington, likening the signers of the Panama Canal treaty to "lackeys" heeding a call from the "boss." An executive order last week banned publication of the magazine for three months. 3.3(b)(1)

[redacted] opposed Videla's travel plans from the outset, but [redacted] were diverted from directly attacking the President by the well-publicized success of his visit. [redacted] also is responsible for spreading rumors that Videla entered into special agreements with US officials during his trip without prior consultation with the junta. 3.3(b)(1)

A minor, but representative sample of Massera's tactics is an extraordinary meeting of admirals that he called at the same time as a regularly scheduled meeting of Videla's cabinet, two of whose members are admirals. In addition, the US Embassy in Buenos Aires reports speculation that the navy maneuvered the disappearance of Alfredo Bravo, the teacher's union leader and a human rights advocate who was kidnaped while Videla was out of the country. Rumors label Bravo's disappearance as an attempt to embarrass the President on the human rights issue precisely at a time when he was endeavoring to improve the country's image. The official admission of Bravo's detention last week represents not only a departure from the handling of similar cases in the past but also a victory for the moderate point of view.

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Whether or not Videla blames the navy for incidents such as the Bravo case, he recognizes them as attempts to discredit his regime and apparently is determined to put an end to such activity. Another heretofore rare instance of the government "going public" on a disappearance occurred early this month with the official confirmation of the detention of a Jewish family suspected of subversive connections.

The military consensus for Videla's rule has always been fragile. Junta members in the past, however, have shown a remarkable ability to turn back from the brink of confrontation.

Nevertheless, outbursts of interservice friction will necessarily slow policymaking and implementation because the President must move with caution on all fronts to preserve his and the army's support. Videla clearly will have to be increasingly alert to attempts by Massera to undo his position, and he will have to divert his attention from policy matters that he wants to address as chief executive. [redacted] 3.5(c)

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